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“WHY DO LEADERS DISAPPOINT? A TALE OF PARADOXES AND A POINT OF NO RETURN”

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Abstract

We venture into discovering, through an inductive approach, what are the actions taken by leaders that make their followers feel disappointed, as well as their consequences. After collecting data from professionals of different sectors (public and private), we conducted a semi cluster analysis in order to reach underlying structures that aim to identify the source of these actions, which were found to be in three paradoxes. As for the consequences, three core concepts were also found, which can be used to divide the former into three groups related to the period of time of their effect.

Keywords

Inductive Approach | Paradoxes | Disappointment | Consequences

1. Introduction & Brief Theoretical Background

Over the course of the years, leadership gained momentum and importance in the ever so evolving competing market (May-Chiun et al., 2015). In fact, leadership measures have been linked to business-unit performance over the years (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Xenikou & Simosi, 2006; Menguc et al., 2007). But until reaching this ‘evolved and acknowledged’ stage of importance, many refinements were made throughout the years regarding this topic (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1999).

Since the early inception of leadership as a concept, researchers rapidly gained interest in exploring it in more detail, which resulted in its constant metamorphosis over the course of years (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen et al., 1982; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991; Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). As a result, many different theories arose attempting to explain what leadership was and how it could be achieved. One common link could be found though, regarding the acknowledgement that ‘leadership’ was observable

in the **relationship** between a follower and a leader, and thus, the first steps towards the conceptualization of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory were taken. As a matter of fact, relational leadership became a fairly recent concept (Uhl-Bien, 2003; Uhl-Bien, 2005), where Uhl-Bien (2006) advanced with a theory about the former which comprised two perspectives: entity (deals with identifying attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships) and relational (acknowledges leadership as process of social construction).

In fact, humans are complex beings, due to their uniqueness and core differences. As Cozolino (2014) puts it *'humans exist within a paradox: we conceive of ourselves as individuals, yet spend our lives embedded in relationships that build, shape, and influence our brains.'* As a consequence, it is possible to assume that each person relates to one another in a different manner, meaning that the resulting relationship one forms will have its own characteristics and dynamics.

If we were to put what was mentioned so far together, it would be the same as stating that each leader and follower will have a specific and unique relationship. Therefore, what may affect one person, may be completely irrelevant to the other. Not only that, but the effect and depth that one action from a leader may have on a follower will most likely vary from one follower to the other, as well. This idea is supported by the definition of high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). The authors summarized past (inconsistent) definitions on connection quality, and aimed at creating a more robust concept. As such, they define high-quality connections to comprise three key features: higher emotional carrying capacity (capable of withstanding expressions of absolute emotion – both positive and negative); high tensility (capability to endure and bounce back from setbacks, and adapt to situations); and high degree of connectivity (relationship's openness to new ideas and ability to avoid behaviors that undermine it). Ultimately, high-quality connections foster learning behaviors in organizations

(Carmeli et al., 2009). Therefore, different degrees of each of the three aforementioned characteristics, when combined, form a unique relationship between a follower and a leader.

The present study's research question is: what are the specific actions taken by leaders that make their subordinates feel disappointed, and what are the direct consequences resulting from them? The latter shall be explored using an inductive approach. The project will be structured as follows: First, we will discover specific situations where leaders disappointed their subordinates, and later on, the consequences which were derived from it. Empirically, the research is based on interviews with professionals from various sectors (in a qualitative exploratory approach), given we are more concerned in identifying a global picture of such actions, rather than in a specific setting. The resulting data was then submitted to a semiotic cluster analysis, as this technique has been described as powerful when it comes to uncover successive levels of meaning, from surface signs to a plausible underlying structure (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994). Some interesting findings were possible to be gathered, which contribute to possible future researches.

2. Method

In order to better grasp the context of the situations where leaders have disappointed their subordinates, individual unstructured interviews were chosen for the data collection. A small interview guideline was used (see Appendix); before reaching the core questions of the interview ('Do you recall a situation where a leader disappointed you? What would you say it was the resulting consequence of his/her action?'), three other open, and more general, questions were asked, given the sensible nature of the topic. Additionally, we were interested in knowing *specifically* a situation (or more than one) where the individual felt like it marked him/her, but interestingly, they naturally considered only powerful situations, and some even replied "the other situations I have in mind are trivial, so I will not bother sharing". This procedure is called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), which is a qualitative research

approach that provides a detailed analysis of critical incidents, further allowing us to identify similarities, differences and patterns, thus seeking insights on the topic (Hughes et al., 2007). A possible way to analyse the resulting data is through semiotic cluster analysis (Shaw & Lishman, 1999), which has been defined as ‘a unified approach to every phenomenon of signification and/or communication’ (Eco, 1976). The assumption of this approach is that superficial signs are related to underlying structures, and it is up to the researcher to make sense of those signs and uncover successive levels of meaning (Manning, 1987). With this in mind, a table with three columns was created (see Figure 1).

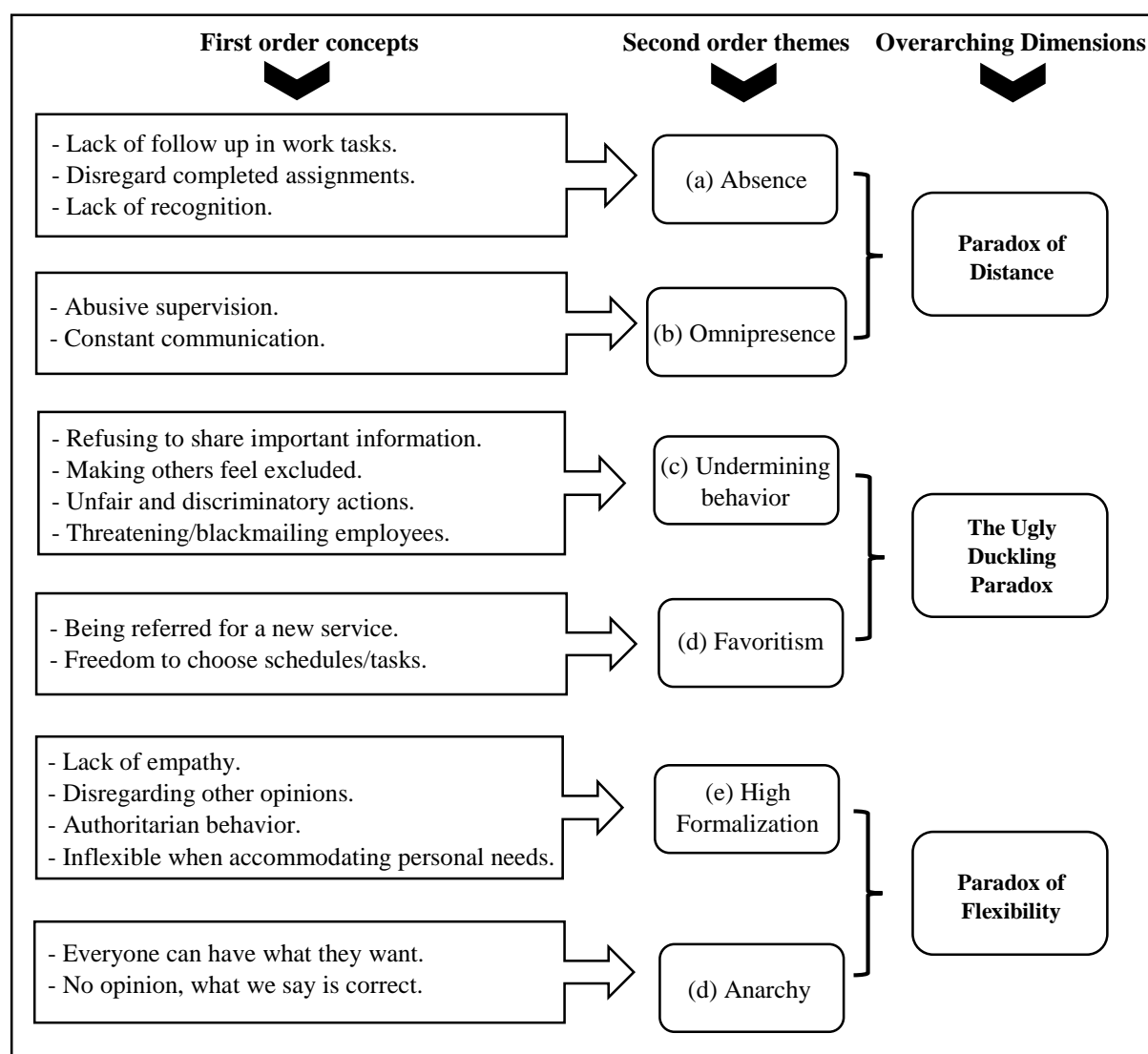


Figure 1 – Semiotic cluster analysis of the qualitative data (*actions*).

The first column deals with the first order concepts, which is basically the data that emerged directly – gathered from the (different) situations described by the interviewees – and

includes the main ways in which the concept of interest was approached by the informants (Cunha, 2005).

The second column, constituted by the second order themes, deals with connotative meanings, and therefore identify underlying patterns from the previous concepts, thus building a new richer meaning and interpretation of the data through thematic associations. It is up to the researcher to find these patterns, which means there is window for different interpretations, and therefore themes. Nonetheless, these interpretations had theory input as well, so as to solidify their credibility. In order to explain how this approach is applied, let us look at one example in detail, where we transform denotative meanings into thematic associations. Some interviewees pointed out a situation where their leader rarely followed-up on the tasks they had assigned to them. Others, complained that there was a total lack of recognition for their work. When these two examples are put together, it is possible to find a common link, which deals with the theme absence.

In a similar fashion, the third column also aims to further interpret the aforementioned results, attempting to reach an underlying structure and represent the root causes. As familiarity with the data increased, it was possible to identify three (now clearer) patterns. However, it should be noted that these should not be taken as ‘final’ (but part of a socially constructed reality instead), as these were reached from personal interpretations of signs, and therefore, these may change according to the researcher and over time. After reaching this last stage, one additional step was taken in order to increase the trustworthiness of the interpretation. The latter consisted in exposing the now resulting model (underlying structure) to three of the interviewees, which all three agreed with.

The sample of this study was initially comprised by 23 Portuguese professionals of different sectors, both private and public, such as health, education, consumer goods, consultancy, and legal. The hierarchy levels ranged from technical to middle management

positions, displaying professions such as director, nurse, operative assistant, accountant, consultant, teacher and secretary. The ages ranged from 24 to 65, with an average of 37.

3. Findings

3.1 Actions

From the raw information, seventeen categorical meanings were collected, which are represented in the first column of Figure 1. Following this step, the search for thematic associations ensued, where 6 themes seemed to better reorganize the data. In order to support and give a more solid foundation as to why these were the interpretations considered, Table 1 (below) should be consulted.

Table 1. Representative supporting data for each 2nd order theme.

2 nd order themes	Representative 1 st order evidence
(a) Absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘He was supposed to follow up on us, and have recurring meetings, in order to guide us and tell us what to do.’ • ‘He completely disregarded everything we had done to that point and focused on telling us what we needed to do.’ • ‘The tasks we were doing were not being recognized, it was as if we were doing nothing (...) we ended up doing everything alone.’ • ‘He does not even realize that he only accomplished his goal because everyone below him did their job.’ • ‘He would distance himself from the group he was leading, he did not interact (...) there was an absence of leadership in crucial moments.’
(b) Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I was practically having weekly meetings in order for her to know what I was thinking of the new service, and if I knew already if I wanted to stay.’ • ‘If she had something in her mind that the other person was not corresponding to, she would drive you to your limit until you said yes.’ • ‘My workplace had security cameras, and he would have them always pointed at me. The minute he did not see me, he would call someone and ask where I went.’ • ‘She listened to so many people complaining [about the interviewee having privileges], that she started to be always on top of me.’
(c) Undermining Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘(...) he would not give us the necessary information and we would have to go directly to the General Manager to obtain it.’ • ‘One of the things that hurt me the most was never winning the employee of the month award (...) during a while everyone would have their turn, but when it got to me, they skipped and started the cycle again.’ • ‘If there is no justice and you do not establish priorities, you may end up hurting someone, which was the case.’

Table 1. (Continued)

2 nd order themes	Representative 1 st order evidence
(d) Favoritism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘For instance, concerning training modules; the people who get chosen are always the same (...) it is a feeling of being excluded.’ • ‘He started to phone everyone, blackmailing us: “you either come and clean, or you do not work here anymore”.’ • ‘They told me I was going there to complete a temporary assignment and after, I would return with my team. After I arrived, I suffered a lot of pressure to stay, since I was referred for that job.’ • ‘On my first day she introduced me to my colleagues saying “she is one of us!”, which made me feel quite pressured.’ • ‘Later I realized I was being given certain benefits, in order to persuade me (...) better schedules, choosing my assignments (...) it started some [bad] rumors around me, from my colleagues.’
(e) High Formalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘She told me without a care (...) she did not order me to transfer services, but it was as if she did. When we lose the capability of seeing ourselves in someone else’s shoes...’ • ‘If she knew how to listen, she would know when to stop, listen to what I was saying and reply “that is in fact more urgent”.’ • ‘Our type of job allows a certain flexibility when managing our schedules, and it is fairly simply for a leader to adjust them accordingly (...) but I was not granted the permission to enjoy my paternity leave when I most needed.’ • ‘I may want to invest more in my professional career if I believe it to be more important, but she has to respect those who think the personal life is their priority.’ • ‘They imposed on me the transfer of a nurse to my service when I did not need more people (...) I believe the intention was good (...) but I do not agree with such a cold and contactless way of dealing with people.
(f) Anarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Even if a person did not put any effort into their work, they could still get whatever they wanted from her, while I was working to feel like I deserved it.’ • ‘In some specific situations of the service, she would accept any proposition we made, since she did not have the knowledge to have her own opinion on the matter.’ • ‘Sometimes I felt as if I had no boss...’

3.1.1 *The Second Order Themes*

As it is possible to be observed, the 6 thematic associations are as follows: (a) Absence, (b) Omnipresence, (c) Undermining Behavior, (d) Favoritism, (e) High Formalization and (f) Anarchy.

Second order theme (a): Absence.

When there is little to no presence from the leader over the follower, one would consider it to fall onto the spectrum of a low-quality LMX relationship, which is characterized as unidirectional downward influence, with formal relations (role-defined) and inaccurate coupled goals (Howell et al., 1999). In fact, it is common for these poor relationships to rely exclusively on formal employment contracts, where a leader maintains a distance between them and the followers (Dunegan et al., 1992). Some of the professionals, for instance, described a recurrent situation where the leader would not follow up on their tasks, and would never hold meetings (as he said he would), and therefore there was no flow of (needed) information for its completion and no recognition ever given. An interviewee even stated that ‘there was an absence of leadership in crucial moments’, which clearly shows a need for guidance that it was not corresponded, but expected. Researchers on leadership have defended that physical distance decreases opportunities for direct influence and thus, fail to elevate the effectiveness of the working relationship between the two (Bass, 1990; Napier & Ferris, 1993; Liden et al., 1997).

Second order theme (b): Omnipresence.

Can there be too much of a good thing? The answer is yes. Although commonly associated with high-quality LMX relationships, where followers have a frequent contact with the leader, feel supported, encouraged and enjoy from consideration (Wayne et al., 1997), ‘presence’ can also have a dark side. Namely, the latter can be seen in displays of abusive supervision, which is the most immediate example one could have. One of our interviewees told us about a situation where her leader would use the cameras on the store, in order to monitor her constantly, and as soon as she left her place, he would call a colleague and ask where she went. This can be interpreted as a hostile nonverbal behavior (Tepper, 2000), and a form of omnipresence. However, perhaps not as obvious as the latter, the dark side of presence can also be found in communication. We had a situation where a professional had weekly meetings with

her leader, for a period of months, as a form of pressuring her to decide on what the leader wanted, which ‘made me feel very anxious’. Such situation reflects communication apprehension, described as the extent to which an individual experiences anxiety in communication situations, derived from supervision information-sharing (McCroskey, 1997; Bartoo & Sias, 2004).

Second order theme (c): Undermining Behavior.

There is no boogeyman in real life, but some people have the unfortunate experience of coming to fear their leader as one. The support for this statement is derived from situations where leaders have intentional undermining behaviors towards their followers. Literature considers the latter as social undermining, which was first introduced by Vinokur and Van Ryn (1993), but had its definition mutated over the years (Vinokur et al., 1996; Duffy et al., 2002). Duffy et al. (2002) extended its concept to the workplace, and refined social undermining to be a ‘*behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpretational relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation*’. The three key ideas to retain are: in order to consider a behavior to be social undermining, it has to be perceived as intentional by the target, must be insidious (weaken gradually or by degrees), and it may take the form of direct actions (rejecting someone outright or saying derogatory things) or through withholding (withholding needed information). On the topic of absence, it was described a situation where the follower was not getting information from her leader, since he was never around; this does not qualify as social undermining, as it lacks intentionality. However, the same interviewee did mention there were innumerable times where she would request information from her leader, face-to-face, and he would just reply ‘I know that, so you should know that’, example which respects the three principles to consider it social undermining.

Second order theme (d): Favoritism.

In parallel to social undermining, there is also another situation where a follower is targeted: favoritism. However, through this perspective, the person falls on the extreme end of the pole, so instead of being ostracized, the person is actually put on a pedestal by the leader. Literature on the subject commonly points out the negative effects of favoritism from three perspectives: the ‘other’ employees – who may feel discriminated against and may end up reducing incentives to exert effort, as the link between rewards and performance seems tainted (Prendergast & Topel, (a) 1993) –, the ‘unfair’ leader – who is seen as biased and may be considered dishonest (Prendergast & Topel, (b) 1993) –, and there is a last one. These researchers considered that indeed, followers may be induced to behave in a certain way, so as to ingratiate themselves with their superior. But what about the point of view of the person who does not wish, or act in a way to, be target of favoritism? What about the story of those which are given additional benefits as a form of retention or ‘wooing’? One of our interviewees exposed a previous experience she went through: she was assigned for a short-term project in another Hospital, where she had been invited to move to in the past, but refused since she wanted to remain where she was. With such a good referral already, when she got there, she was immediately received and introduced by her new leader to her colleagues as ‘one of them, which made me feel quite pressured’. Over time, she realized she was being given benefits that others did not have access to, as her new leader was trying to make her change her mind and move to that Hospital (which she had refused in the past). Naturally, her colleagues became aware of the situation, and started to ostracize her (which leads us back to social undermining, but this time coming from the colleagues, and not the leader). An interesting finding in our research, was that in closed environments, the lack of transparency led to more negative consequences than in other settings, since the followers can more easily judge and evaluate their leader’s actions.

Second order theme (e): High Formalization.

The rationale for this thematic association came from the fact that the primary data suggested several situations where leaders were completely inflexible in adjusting to their follower's personal needs, even when it did not require much deviation from the normal procedures. It is in fact this robot-like behavior that drives the lack of empathy, which lets these professionals disappointed. Aiken & Hage (1966) defined the latter as high degree of formalization, which comprehends a high level of work standardization, with minor freedom to deviate from standards. Moreover, it compels not only a great set of rules defining jobs and what to be done, but also their assured enforcement. A situation in particular stands out when thinking of the aforementioned high necessity to follow the rules: one of the interviewees had been recently a father, and as such, he had rights to enjoy his paternity leave. However, only after a month of having the baby, did his wife and child return home. When he questioned his leader about finally enjoying his rightful days, he saw this request denied, under the justification that he only had rights to those on the first month subsequent to the birth. The interviewee even stated that his 'type of job allows a certain flexibility when managing our schedules, and it is fairly simple for a leader to adjust them accordingly', but in that case, 'rules are rules'.

Second order theme (f): Anarchy.

If one would consider the extreme opposite of a workplace that is commanded by rules, and rules only, an anarchy would be best to describe such scenario. A more practical and current description, however, lies on a *laissez-faire* leadership style, which stands for a hands-off approach, as Avocado et al. (1999) entitled as an 'absent leadership'. More recent research took the previous concept, and went a step beyond, by considering a *laissez-faire* leadership style to be destructive, with potential devastating consequences for the subordinates (Skogstad et al., 2007). In our sample, we were able to collect a case of this latter scenario. An interviewee

uncovered a frequent situation where each and every colleague would get what they wanted from their leader, whether they deserved it or not, ‘while I was working to feel like I deserved it’. Moreover, another situation that he told us that happened frequently, was that in some specific matters of the service, the leader would ‘blindly’ take any suggestion to solve a given issue, since she did not have the knowledge to even debate. At times, he ‘felt as if I had no boss...’ which Skogstad et al. (2007) mentioned by stating that ‘*a laissez-faire leadership style (...) implies not meeting the legitimate expectations of the subordinates and/or superiors concerned*’.

3.1.2 The Overarching Dimensions

The last step of the semiotic cluster analysis allowed us to identify overarching dimensions that ultimately reflected paradoxes. In fact, one could say we were in the presence of paradoxes, which Eisenhardt & Westcott (1988) defined as contradictions embedded in organizational practices. By exploring these, researchers have the possibility to see beyond, by acknowledging the complexity and diversity that is inherent to organizational life (Cameron & Quinn, 1988). Lewis (2000) gave valuable insights on this topic, by creating a framework to venture into demystifying the natural complexity that paradoxes represent. The core lessons possible to be extracted are that, first, there are underlying tensions between two poles, which represent the source of these paradoxes. Second, when trying to deal with these rising tensions, leaders often fall into the trap of applying simplified solutions and thus, try to solve the unsolvable, which ultimately leads to reinforcing cycles. The latter is explained by the fact that these leaders are answering to a natural call to reduce the anxiety that paradoxes provoke, and consequently try to suppress these contradictions and maintain a false appearance of order, only resulting in intensifying the pressure from the opposing polarity. Our results pointed to the existence of three paradoxes.

Paradox of Distance

Some interviewees complained about having a leader that was just completely absent, while others were complaining about having a leader who was always on top of them (omnipresent). It is the tension concerning what level of distance leadership should hold that results in this paradox, since it would be optimal to have a leader who is close enough to hold frequent communication and aid in supplying information, while at the same time giving space for their employees to do their work autonomously. It is fairly safe to assume that the case where leaders are absent originate more complaints, than those who seek to engage in frequent communication (as the latter at least increases the chances for information-sharing). Nonetheless, organizations may try to tackle the issues of absence by implementing measures to force communication between leaders and followers. Bouchikhi (1998) stated that complexities such as the one described are often downplayed to either/or frameworks, but this is a critical mistake, since it will most likely lead to the aforementioned reinforcing cycle. By supressing one of the sides, the other will have its pressure increased, and may move the organization from a situation of lack of communication, to excessive. Thus, now measures to reduce it must be taken, which throws us into a loop.

The Ugly Duckling Paradox

No one wants to be the ostracized ugly duckling, while at the same time, being the gracious swan that takes the spotlight is also not a desired position to be in. Do we rather be hated by our leader, or by our co-workers? (Do we really have to choose?) Hopefully, the answer is by none. Subordinates may find themselves in situations where their leader, for whatever reason, puts a target on their back, and social undermining behaviors take place (as it was mentioned earlier), such as (intentionally) making that person feel excluded/rejected. At the other extreme of the pole, we would find a subordinate who is held most dearly, and the focus of attention of the leader, which could incite malicious envy from the colleagues, often

associated with resentment (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Lewis (2000) does mention situations where, for instance, formal procedures aimed at guarantying fair treatment of employees lead many times to claims of injustice. Therefore, the challenge here is that a leader needs to simultaneously find appropriate ways of being inclusive of others, while taking into consideration that the other subordinates will monitor and judge events in their environments (Lazarus, 1995), and caution must be taken not to make them feel excluded. Thus, organizations need to be careful when dealing with these matters, as paradoxes are indeed double-edged swords.

Paradox of Flexibility

Subordinates do not want leaders to be rigorous and inflexible, but having a leader who says ‘yes’ to everything and everyone is no better. If someone requests something from a leader and their answer is always ‘What do the rules say?’ then we are likely in a high degree of formalization setting. These organizations have guidelines for how one should think and react to specific situations, leaving little room for exceptions, and previous studies showed workers in these conditions had high levels of dissatisfaction and felt their work was meaningless (Aiken & Hage, 1966). If organizations, on the other hand, adopt a *laissez-faire* leadership style, then we would be at the other end of the pole. As it was mentioned, this type of leadership is considered to be destructive, and therefore should not be the way to go. The tension that incubates this paradox has its source on the idea that leaders should have rules and procedures (and actually enforce them), but still be flexible to access situations and adapt their path of action accordingly.

Paradox Classification: The Tree of Life

Lewis, by gathering various scholar’s works, ended up creating an exemplary guide, categorizing three groups of ‘mother’ paradoxes. Lewis (2000) found a pattern for situations

of conflicting yet simultaneous demands for ‘control and flexibility’, which he considered paradoxes of organizing. It is the tension between these two fronts in organizations that ultimately leads to contradictory situations (for instance, implementing measures to foster empowerment and autonomy, while simultaneously implementing a control system). Two of our paradoxes seem to fit this category: the paradox of distance, and the paradox of flexibility. The former’s underlying concepts are control (omnipresence) and no-control (absence, which is not necessarily flexibility), while the latter’s are literally control (high degree of formalization implies total control) and flexibility (in the form of a *laissez-faire* approach that gives total freedom for employees to do as they fit best). In addition to the paradoxes of organizing, Lewis also found a category of paradoxes of belonging, which deal with a struggle between the ‘self and the other’. In his study, he mentions the existence of simultaneous feelings of inclusion and exclusion (Martin, 1992), which clearly classifies our ugly duckling paradox as a paradox of belonging (which seems like a natural fit).

The author considered that usually these paradoxes are interrelated. In fact, more recently, Smith & Lewis (2011) expanded the initial ‘original tree of life’ and further extended the list of categories, by adding tensions that are possible to be found in the intersections. Namely, tensions in the crossed-realm of belonging-organizing paradoxes. These latter deal with tensions between the individual and the aggregate; the premiss is that ‘organizing’ involves collective action that in its nature detracts individual considerations for the benefit of the whole. However, research supports that when individuals identify themselves with the whole while still contributing with their personal strengths, ‘organizing’ becomes most successful.

3.2 Consequences

This chapter explores the consequences that result from the now discovered paradoxes embedded in the leaders actions. The same methodology and approach was used, with a slight difference. We are no longer in the presence of paradoxes, but instead, underlying core concepts (further analyzed).

As it is possible to be observed in Figure 2 (below), five second order themes were possible to be arranged. This exercise could be said to be more simple and direct, when compared to the actions. Indeed, literature led to the following thematic associations: (1) Health issues, (2) Job Performance, (3) Turnover, (4) Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), and (5) Inflexibility.

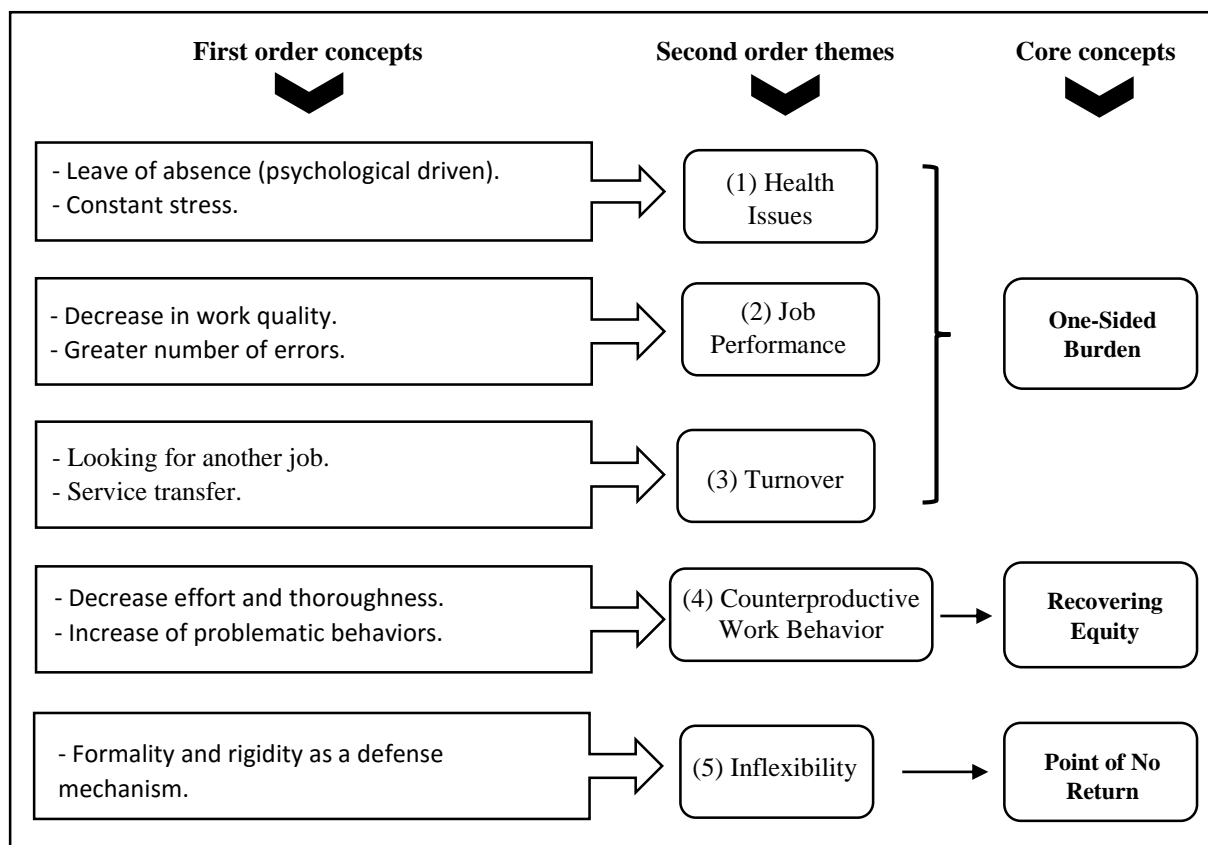


Figure 2 – Semiotic cluster analysis of the qualitative data (*consequences*).

Representative evidence for the formation of these associations is given in the Table 2 (below).

Table 2. Representative supporting data for each 2nd order theme.

2 nd order themes	Representative 1 st order evidence
(1) Health Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘(...) in reality my nervous system was not there and it was as if I did not know how to work’. • ‘The consequence? I had to prolong my absence of leave because psychologically... I was even more devastated’. • ‘She was actually persecuting me, and even made up a lie to have me fired. I had to be admitted to a psychological facility after that experience’.
(2) Job Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The quality of the work done was not good, because when you are stressed you lose focus (...) these are negative consequences from a bad leader that destabilizes the entire work system.’ • ‘(...) and sometimes they were returned. Why? Because it had errors (...) I was under such great pressure that it just would not come out.’ • ‘It is a bad leader because it does not read the service necessities (...) increases the workload for those who end up working that day, the number of errors, risk factor, (...)’.
(3) Turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I could not wait to get out of there, which I did after 6 months.’ • ‘I needed to change, so I decided to ask to be transferred to another service’. • ‘That situation culminated in having me sending my first CV as soon as I got home’.
(4) CWB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘In terms of cleaning and orders she gave us, we did it almost by chance... or we would clean just what she could see (...) but before we were thorough’. • ‘That is what happened, I would provoke her on purpose. If you are going to persecute me, then I will give you reasons for you do it’. • ‘As a revenge I would say “wasn’t she the employee of the month? Ask her then’.
(5) Inflexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I could not wait to get out of there, which I did after 6 months.’ • ‘I needed to change, so I decided to ask to be transferred to another service’. • ‘That situation culminated in having me sending my first CV as soon as I got home’.

3.2.1 The Core Concepts

The focus of the analysis will be given to the core concepts, rather than giving an extensive literature review on each of the vastly known consequences of bad practices in the workplace. Instead, the contribution of this work (in this chapter) is found in the former. A division of consequences concerning the (comparative) duration of their effect stood out when looking at the thematic associations: immediate, on-going/continuous, and long-lasting.

One-Sided Burden (immediate)

This concept comprises the consequences which only the follower has to carry and deal with. These are health issues (namely stress and psychological distress), job performance (in the sense that the subordinate's quality of work decreases, as the number of errors increase), and turnover (the subordinate finds himself in a position where he cannot stay any longer in his current job or service/division). The impact of these consequences that result from some of the actions aforementioned, have an immediate effect followed to that said action. For instance, after a very negative meeting between a follower and a leader, her instant reaction was sending her CV to other companies (turnover intention). Moreover, we could also consider an incident where a leader had quite an insensitive attitude towards a gravely ill follower, which immediately resulted in her taking an absence of leave for a longer period of time, due to the psychological distress caused. These consequences, as one can see, affect only the follower, and thus, we considered them to be one-sided burdens.

Recovering Equity (ongoing/continuous)

There may be the case where not only a follower has to carry the burden of a consequence, but a leader may fall victim of his own actions as well. The latter statement is supported by the concept of Counterproductive Work Behavior, which comprises behaviors such as aggression, interpersonal conflict, sabotage, and theft (Spector & Miles, 2001). In addition, CWB has been linked with organizational justice (employee perceptions of fair or just treatment on the job). Over the list of possible responses from employees to perceptions of unfair treatments, resentment and desire for retribution become especially relevant (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). In our study, one of the interviewees mentioned that, as a response mechanism to abusive supervision (constantly monitored by her leader), she would intentionally display problematic behaviors to provoke her manager (this is an example of retribution). Drawing from equity theory, individuals who perceive themselves in a position of being under-rewarded

experience distress, which ultimately leads to efforts in restoring equity. Therefore, linking the aforementioned concepts, it is possible to state that employees who perceive a lack of organizational justice towards them, will display behaviors to counter-balance those injustices. Hence, the name for this core concept: recovering equity. It is indeed a process, and may not be instantly restored with one action. Depending on the ‘unfair action’, the scale may be more or less uneven, and therefore the time needed to restore it to the optimal point may vary. Therefore, we consider these consequences to have an ongoing/continuous period of time, and in this situation the leader will also have to carry the burden, as the follower will react in response to his action.

Point of No Return (everlasting)

We now reach the last concept, which given its implications, might be the most important. Our research, with the creation of this concept, aims to go a step further. In fact, individuals react differently to a given action for a certain set of reasons. But what if that is the action that trespasses a limit? What if that is the action that ultimately destroys the scale of equity, and not simply originate uneven sides? In that case, the consequence will be a long-lasting one, altering not only the behavior of a subordinate from then onwards, but more importantly, affecting future dynamics in the relationships with new leaderships. One of the interviewees in our research shared a situation that culminated in the aforementioned result. Always giving more than it was requested from her, this professional always walked the extra mile, and it was even involved in numerous projects in her workplace. However, derived from a personal need, she found herself in the need to move to a fixed schedule (rather than shifts), and informally asked her leader, only to see her request denied. Therefore, she saw no other option than to fill a formal request, to exercise her rights, which was granted (with handicaps, she mentions). The leader did not receive it well and actually saw it as a challenging behavior (who holds more power?). Before the end of the period of time that was granted, he changed

her schedule without warning her (it was even during her vacations, so she was not present), to a regime that completely failed to accommodate her need. She saw it as ‘you tried to have it your way, but now you will have it my way’. The direct and immediate consequence was she moving to another service (the board gave her the option when she reported the situation, and she accepted), given the ‘bad character and uncalled display of strength’ of the leader. But ultimately, the consequence was deeper than that; when questioned about her relationship with the new leader, she stated that ‘from now on, I will not be as available as I was, or do things in an informal manner; I will not be as flexible; I will not leave room for another situation like this to take place’. The interviewee even commented that ‘a leader should have the responsibility to understand this: his/her action might transform completely the relationship that worker will have from thereon with new leaders’.

4. DISCUSSION

Uncertainty is the one true certainty nowadays (yet another paradox). As Moch & Pondy (1977) put, maybe the best suiting method to deal with the latter fact, is by having the ‘organizational equivalent of an all-terrain vehicle’. Companies may be equipping its leadership with city vehicles, being ever so carefully in preparing and calculating the safest route, but they need to face reality: organizational life is a rocky road with loads of bumps; and paradoxes. The latter approach is also supported by Lewis (2000), which considers that implementing linear and rational problem solving models in today’s organizational framework, will only hurt management. Instead, managers need to recognize that the source of tensions have its origin from the aforementioned paradoxes, and explore them thoroughly, rather than trying to simplify them. Eisenhardt & Westcott (1988) state that paradoxes contribute to management thinking by fostering creative insight and change. For that, one needs to (as Lewis entitled) transcend, which implies the capacity to think paradoxically. Indeed, attempts at understanding how to manage

this paradoxical reality of organizations is catching up, and recent research ventures into directly linking leadership with paradoxes, thus creating concepts such as paradoxical leadership (Lavine, 2014), and paradoxical leader behaviors (Zhang et al., 2015). The latter concept is described as '*dynamic and synergistic approaches to contradictions in organizational management*', which is supported on the thought that using paradoxical behaviors to handle organizational paradoxes, will ultimately lead to a more effective organizational functioning. In the end, both works mention the importance of holistic thinking and behavioral flexibility as the key elements to tackle the current organizational tensions. In addition, Zhang et al. (2015) identified the same tensions that originated our three paradoxes: maintaining both distance and closeness (paradox of distance); treating subordinates uniformly, while allowing individualization (the ugly duckling paradox); and enforcing work requirements, while allowing flexibility (paradox of flexibility), which supports the validity of our findings.

Until organizations fully grasp this new era of paradoxes and take a transcendent stance, leaders will continue to fall on repeated traps, and consequences will be generated. However, it is not possible to state which action will result into what consequence – this exercise would be a dangerous one, and most likely incorrect. Antonakis & Atwater (2002) discussed that depending on how (physically) 'close' or how 'distant' followers are from their leaders, leader behaviors will affect followers differently. In addition, Huseman et al. (1987) summarized literature that support what is called the 'norm of equity'. That is to say, there is an assumption that individuals are equally sensitive to equity, meaning that the ratio between outcome/input is optimal when equal to that of the comparison of the other. In their work, the authors discussed a new approach to equity theory, nominated equity sensitivity. The latter comprises the idea that individuals reactions to equity/inequity vary according to individual's preferences for different outcome/input ratios. These statements go in line with our initial claim that two

subordinates may react differently to the same action, given that the relationship between leader and follower represent a unique living cell (dynamic and mutative). Therefore, a specific action may lead to either a one-sided burden (immediate effect and follower takes all the weight), recovering equity (both follower and leader will be affected, for an on-going/continuous period of time), or to a point of no return (everlasting, and alteration of future relationships' dynamics).

There was an interesting finding related to some of the followers reporting that there were no resulting consequences, even from some very disappointing situations. The common link that was possible to be found, was that in these cases, there was an open talk with their leader, after the said action took place. Indeed, when leaders made their followers feel like they could talk openly about any situation, it gave them room to confront their leader about situations they deemed unfair. In the majority of the situations, the followers ended up understanding why the leader had to take that decision, and even though they were still disappointed, no negative consequence resulted from it. Transparent communication can be linked to authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004), which is defined as *‘a pattern of leader behaviors that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development’* (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Additionally, Vogelgesang et al. (2013) with their results, contributed to the body of literature which highlights that a leader's communication transparency positively influences the followers perception of integrity, by giving them confidence and stability (in the former's performance), which allows them to become more engaged with their work.

Limitations, boundary conditions, and future research

One should take into account that the results that were possible to be found were originated from inductive reasoning (Arthur, 1994), and therefore, generalized statements should be made with caution. As such, future research should make use of deductive investigation to further complement our results. In addition, as it was mentioned, the sample comprised professionals from various sectors and different professions, since we were more interested in collecting data from a generalized setting. However, it should be noted that 50% of the individuals belonged to the health sector, where the strong majority were nurses.

Cultural context should be also taken into account, and as such our interpretations should be tested in other settings. This boundary condition is originated from the possibility of existing a Portuguese leadership prototype, which may influence the relationship between leader and follower.

We leave some recommendations for future research, namely analyzing also the leader's perspective, which is to say, what are the actions from followers that make leaders feel disappointed, and what are the consequences? As we have seen, not only organizations, but also relationships are complex, and therefore, one should know the story told from both sides of the participants. In addition, exploring what defines the 'breaking point' in followers may also become important information for organizations to hold.

5. Conclusion

As a starting point, we wanted to discover, through an inductive approach, what were the actions taken by leaders that made their followers feel disappointed, and what the resulting consequences of such acts were.

The present research contributes to this topic, by shedding light on disappointing actions being generated in (underlying) organizational paradoxes. When leaders do not face their complexity and choose to adopt simplistic models for problem solving, then instead of easing the rising tensions, it only leads to a reinforcing cycle. Although there are innumerable studies on what are the practices that lead to negative consequences in the workplace, one has to wonder why there are still so many problematic situations in organizations. It is indeed the existence of underlying paradoxes that, like a tectonic plate, move from time to time, thus provoking total chaos in companies. Instead of running away from the problem, or even hope for it not to happen again, organizations should be investing in earthquake resistant buildings. In this light, they should adopt paradoxical behaviors (holistic thinking and behavioral flexibility) to tackle these tensions, and continuously adapt to the complex environments we face nowadays.

By failing to accomplish the latter, negative situations will continue to proliferate inside organizations. Our work suggests that the possible consequences can be grouped in terms of durability of their effect. Some will take immediate effect following the action (one-sided burden), others will go for an ongoing/continuous period of time (recovering equity), while some may become scars (the point of no return). Lastly, we leave a cautionary tale for leaders, in terms of avoiding to push a follower into the 'Point of No Return', where the consequences surpass organizational losses, as they are long lasting alterations that are formed.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Think about the leaders you have had during your professional career.

- Overall, would you consider you have had positive or negative experiences?
- Could you describe what a good leader is to you?
- And what about a bad leader?

(1) - Do you recall a situation where a leader has disappointed you?

(2) - What was the action taken by that leader that made you feel disappointed in him/her? And why did that specific action disappoint you?

(3) - What would you say it was your reaction to it, meaning, the result/consequence of such action?

Think about your current leadership and your colleagues.

- How would you describe your relationship with your current leader?
- How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?
- Would you say everyone is treated equally, or are there certain colleagues/groups who seem to have a special treatment?
 - (If YES): In what ways does that "special treatment" take form? More opportunities, less responsibilities, etc.?